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# ClickOnDetroit.com

## Police: Possible Child's Body Found As They Searched Home

POSTED: 7:30 pm EST December 19, 2007

**FORT WAYNE, Ind.** -- Police discovered what they believe may be the body of a child as they were searching the home of a man arrested on separate charges.

Fort Wayne police went to the home of 38-year-old John W. Gonzales on Tuesday after receiving a tip that a child's body might be there.

When officers arrived, Gonzales had barricaded himself in a room with one of his children, said police spokesman Roy Sutphin.

Gonzales surrendered shortly after police arrived, and the child was taken into protective custody.

After getting a search warrant for the home, police found what may be the body of a young child wrapped in a plastic bag inside a storage container. The possible body may have been encased in concrete at one time, Sutphin said.

The coroner is investigating to determine whether the item is a body, and if it is, an autopsy may be done as early as Thursday, Sutphin said.

If the item is a body, police believe the death may have occurred in Port Huron, Mich. Sutphin did not elaborate on why police think the death may have occurred there. Police from both Port Huron and Fort Wayne are investigating.

Gonzales was arrested on preliminary charges of criminal recklessness, child neglect, felony battery to a juvenile and resisting law enforcement. All the charges were from Tuesday's incident and past investigations, not the investigation into the possible child's body.

Gonzales was being held in Allen County Jail on Wednesday, and police did not know whether he had an attorney.

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# Autopsy on baby boy being conducted now

By **BOBBY AMPEZZAN**  
*Times Herald*

An autopsy is being conducted right now in Fort Wayne, Ind., said Port Huron police Capt. Donald Porrett, on the body of what is believed to be that of an 18-month-old Port Huron boy, the son of John William Gonzales.

Gonzales is the man Fort Wayne police believe has kept the body of a child who died as many as two years before in Port Huron in a plastic bag.

Acting on a tip, Fort Wayne police visited the home of Gonzales, 38, Tuesday afternoon. Gonzalez, who lived at several residences in Port Huron, at first barricaded himself inside a room in the house but surrendered after a short time.

A search of the house revealed the body of a young child wrapped in a plastic bag and placed in a storage container. Police believe the body was at one time encased in concrete.

Port Huron police officers traveled across the state line Tuesday night to aid investigators in Fort Wayne, Ind.

Porrett said the autopsy may reveal the cause of death, but depending on the level of decomposition, investigators may have to run DNA to discover if in fact the body is that of an 18-month-old boy as police believe.

**For more news updates, click on [www.thetimesherald.com](http://www.thetimesherald.com).**

Originally published December 20, 2007

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Article published Dec 20, 2007  
Indiana toddler may have died in Port Huron  
Child possibly was dead before father left area

By BOBBY AMPEZZAN, MOLLY MONTAG and SHANNON MURPHY  
Times Herald

Police believe the body of a toddler found in a plastic bag Tuesday at a Fort Wayne, Ind. home may have died more than two years ago in Port Huron.

Two Port Huron police officers are in Indiana to help with the investigation that started after Fort Wayne police, acting on a tip, visited former Port Huron resident John William Gonzales' home. Gonzales, 38, initially barricaded himself inside the home but surrendered after a short time.

While searching the home, police found the bag containing the body stuffed in a storage container. Police believe the body may have at one time been encased in concrete. An autopsy may be done today.

Gonzales has been arrested on charges of criminal recklessness and resisting law enforcement related to Tuesday's incident. He was arrested on charges of child neglect and felony battery to a juvenile based on past investigations, said Roy Sutphin, spokesman for the Fort Wayne Police Department.

Port Huron police Capt. Don Porrett said the body found at Gonzales' home is believed to be that of an 18-month-old boy belonging to Gonzales and his girlfriend. He would not release the name of the girlfriend or the boy.

The captain said police had contact with the couple from 1999 to 2005 and at no time did the contact involve a child, but Gonzales did mention having a child.

Police are investigating any link between the family, the death of a child and Port Huron.

Locally, Gonzales has a lengthy court record dating back to 1994, when he pleaded guilty in St. Clair County District Court to unlawful use of a motor vehicle. His convictions include drunken driving, driving with a suspended license and disorderly conduct.

He also has convictions for nonpayment of rent, according to court records, and in one of those cases, Ashley Marie Snowden, 23, was listed as a co-defendant when the two lived at 2533 Maple St.

Neighbors who lived next door to Gonzales on White and Maple streets in 2005 recall he was living with a pregnant woman and a toddler.

David Neely recognized Gonzales from a photo and said the couple lived next door to him at 2533 Maple St. for about a week. Neely guessed they had a son about 2 years old.

"I heard them fighting, and I heard the kid crying," he said Wednesday. "I don't know if he (the child) was involved or just scared."

He said after a few days he didn't see the young child anymore, and when he asked, "she (the pregnant woman) said the kid was at her mom or somebody's house."

Peggy Hotchkiss, 60, also remembered the couple. She said they lived next door to her at 618 White St. for a few months a few years ago.

Gonzales liked to party with his friends outside in the street and left beer cans in the yard.

She didn't remember the couple fighting on a regular basis, but said the woman kicked in the door and windows of the house more than once.

In Indiana, Gonzales has several misdemeanor convictions for check deception and was convicted of three counts of sexual misconduct with a minor in 1997.

According to court documents, he had sex with a girl from the time she was 12 to the time of his arrest, when she was 15.

For that crime, he was sentenced to 1½ years in prison. He was not required to register as a sex offender.

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## Parents of speechless child charged

By SHAUN BYRON and ANN ZANIEWSKI  
Of The Oakland Press

A West Bloomfield Township couple are facing criminal charges and could lose their parental rights after the man was accused of repeatedly raping his teenage daughter while her mother looked the other way.

Autistic and unable to speak, the 14-year-old disclosed the alleged abuse by typing on a keyboard in a method called facilitated communication. Both parents deny wrongdoing. Their defense attorneys say the communication method hasn't been held up in courts of law as scientifically reliable.

In facilitated communication, a person helps the teen type on a computer by directing her fingers to the corresponding keys.

Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor Andrea Dean said the teen's parents have previously publicly supported facilitated communication, with her father even authoring an article about it in an autism magazine.

"It's amazing how the parents are very big proponents of this method of communication, but as soon as the child discloses sexual abuse, now the parents are arguing that this is not a proper means of communication," Dean said.

The Oakland Press is not naming the defendants to protect the teen from being identified.

Dean said the teen was working with a paraprofessional at Walled Lake Central High School who asked about her Thanksgiving break. The teen responded that it was awful, and said that "My dad gets me up, bangs me and then we have breakfast." The girl clarified that "bangs" referred to having sex.

"The father denies it," said defense attorney Jerome Sabbota, who is representing the father. "But the way it works is the child has been abused, let's arrest everybody."

Dean said the teen said the abuse started when she was 6 and that she used symbols and pictures at that age to try to communicate what was going on to her mother.

"Mom basically looked the other way and failed to protect her," Dean said.

Investigators requested that the teen have a physical examination. Dean said that her mother threatened her to not tell anyone what happened, and the

exam never took place. After the teen was removed from the home, an exam was conducted that revealed tears consistent with sexual abuse.

Dean said the teen's brother has said he observed some of the abuse. The brother has a form of autism known as Aspergers Syndrome, which leaves him with communication problems, although he doesn't use facilitated communication.

Dean said the teen was removed from her home around Nov. 27 and went to live with a rabbi the family knows. Dean said the teen said that her parents visited her at the rabbi's house and said that they weren't happy with what she had told investigators, and that they were going to take her to South Africa. The rabbi denies they were ever there.

Sabbota said that story is just not true, and that the family had planned on going to South Africa before the allegations arose.

The girl's 52-year-old father is being charged with three counts of first-degree child abuse and a count of second-degree child abuse. The 44-year-old mother is being charged with second-degree child abuse and witness intimidation with an alternative charge of interfering with a police investigation. A preliminary exam on the criminal charges is set for 8:30 a.m. Jan. 24 before 48th District Court Judge Marc Barron.

Prosecutors are moving to terminate their parental rights to the victim and her 13-year-old brother, who are now in protective care. At a court hearing this week, Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Joan E. Young granted the mother a onehour-a-week, supervised visit with her son, but neither parent is allowed to have contact with their daughter, Dean said.

Another pretrial hearing about parental rights is scheduled for Feb. 5.

Attorney Robyn Frankel, who is representing the mother in the criminal case with former circuit judge Deborah Tyner, also said that the facilitated communication has been proven unreliable.

"It is not a scientifically based program, it is based on emotional support," said Frankel, adding that the parents now question the method's legitimacy.

"One of the criticisms over the years is that it gave unrealistic hope to parents that there was intellect and brilliance in this child," she said. "There are critics that say the primary supporters are parents who want to believe in their children."

Sabbota said facilitated communication has been their only way to unlock their daughter's mind after years of silence.

"These parents have tried for years and years to communicate with their child," Sabbota said. "Imagine what that would be like, that your child can't tell you what she wants. ... You don't know if they want to eat or go to the bathroom.

"It's a different world they live in."

Sabbota said the girl's disability doesn't mean she isn't capable of confused

sexual thoughts.

"Just because they're autistic doesn't mean children don't have sexual drives," he said. "Who knows what they fantasize about?"

Frankel said she has not seen the girl use the communication method herself and is withholding judgment, but says even the American Psychology Association labels it as being unscientific.

"Her thought process is different from yours or mine," she said. "It stores information differently, it processes it differently. It is on a different level than yours or mine.

"It's a tragic case all the way around."

Contact staff writer Ann Zaniwski at (248) 745-4628 or [ann.zaniwski@oakpress.com](mailto:ann.zaniwski@oakpress.com).

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# Newsmakers 2007: Dad keeps waging battle over child support

Posted by [RoNeisha Mullen | The Flint Journal](#) December 20, 2007  
07:14AM

Former Flint resident Robert R. Parker Jr. is continuing his longshot fight against state and local officials after he was jailed in 2005 for unpaid child support.

Profiled in The Flint Journal in April, Parker has appealed the dismissal of a federal lawsuit in which he made the unusual claim that Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox and others were part of a racketeering conspiracy against him.

Besides Cox, the \$66-million lawsuit names the Genesee County Friend of the Court office and former FOC head Jennie R. Barkey, who is now a probate judge.

"I intend on dealing with them until they get it right," said Parker, 51. "They had this image of me as a child support scofflaw, and here I am guilty of nothing."

In 2005, Parker was thrown in jail for nonpayment of child support and ordered to pay \$15,000. He claimed he didn't owe the money because his ex-wife denied him visitation with his daughter.

Parker fought back, took his case to the state Court of Appeals and won, getting his conviction overturned in 2006 and an order to get his money back.

Parker will return to Genesee County Circuit Court on Jan. 7 on a motion for the return of the \$15,000 and a passport he was forced to surrender.

"The original charge against Parker was brought in good faith," said Matt Frendewey, spokesman for the attorney general, told The Journal in April.

The Journal could not reach the attorney general's office this week.

Parker, who now resides in Alpharetta, Ga., is a Flint native and high school dropout with a law degree. He is currently unemployed and said the case cost him a "good job" handling hurricane insurance claims.

"I was making \$240,000 a year when these idiots came after me," Parker said. "I've been broke since."

As for his daughter, Parker said he still hasn't spoken to her.

"Even though she's graduated law school and is practicing somewhere, she's the real victim here," he said. "It's an unfortunate set of circumstances, but I continue to wish her well in her life."

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# The Daily Telegram

[Print Page](#)

**THURSDAY DECEMBER 20, 2007** Last modified: *Wednesday, December 19, 2007 10:52 AM EST*

## Teen charged with murder

A homicide case is being filed in juvenile court, charging a teenager in the death of her grandmother.

By [Dennis Pelham](#)

Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN — A teenager has been charged with the murder of her grandmother last year in a juvenile petition filed in the family division of Lenawee County Circuit Court. The identities of the suspect and victim are being withheld by Probate Judge Margaret M. S. Noe pending an initial hearing scheduled for Thursday afternoon.

The Lenawee County Sheriff's Department issued a statement that an investigation by its detectives resulted in charges being authorized by the Lenawee County prosecutor's office. The statement did not name the victim and suspect nor reveal any details of the alleged murder. The age of the suspect was given as the reason for not releasing details of the murder case.

Sheriff Larry Richardson said his office is not making public any further information it has in the case.

A hearing to determine if there is probable cause to prosecute the suspect is scheduled for Thursday afternoon, said David Stanifer, administrator of Lenawee County Probate Court. The hearing is to be held in the maximum security wing of Maurice Spear Campus and will not be open to the public, he said.

Criminal cases involving juveniles are public record in Michigan. The court is not making the file in this homicide case available to the public until after the preliminary hearing, Stanifer said.

Homicide prosecutions in the juvenile court system are rare in Lenawee County but not unheard of, Stanifer said. He recalled a half dozen homicide cases being filed in the county's juvenile court system during his 36-year career.

Michigan law allows prosecutors the option of charging suspects younger than 17 in the adult court system, depending on circumstances. If there is a conviction in the adult court system, judges have the option of sentencing juvenile defendants as adults or as juveniles.

The last homicide case in Lenawee County involving a juvenile occurred in 2000 when a 15-year-old boy, Justin James Gibson of Pittsford, was accused of shooting his grandmother to death at her Rollin Township home. He pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced in circuit court to life in prison.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--

## Casco gunman charged with woman's murder

Wednesday, December 19, 2007 4:26 PM EST

A Casco Township man has been arraigned on multiple felony charges, including the murder of his children's mother.

Derek Lance Woodley, 34, was arraigned Friday, Dec. 14, in Allegan County District Court on charges of open murder, felony firearms, two counts of attempted murder of a police officer and unlawful imprisonment.

Michigan State Police troopers, along with Allegan County sheriff deputies and Bangor police were dispatched early Tuesday, Dec. 11, to check on a report of a woman and child being held against their will. State police first arrested another man whom they met at the home on 60th Street because he had an outstanding warrant. They then entered the home, where they say Woodley fired at them with a shotgun, hitting state Trooper Paul Gonyeau in the hand. The troopers retreated and called in more officers, including SWAT teams and negotiators.

Woodley came out about seven hours later, at which time police entered and found the body of Lindsey Knight, 19. Knight had apparently been shot. She was described as Woodley's girlfriend and the mother of two children with him.

Woodley remains in the Allegan County Jail.



Derek Woodley

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## KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

### **From hands to heartsQuilters' creations provide joy to children from abusive homes**

Thursday, December 20, 2007

BY CHUCK PARKER

Special to the Gazette

KALAMAZOO -- Joy and tears seem to go together at the Kalamazoo Log Cabin Quilters annual Christmas event to give stuffed animals wrapped in quilts to two area agencies that help children in need.

The quilters divided 150 swaddled, stuffed animals Tuesday between Sylvia's Place in Allegan County and Children and Family Services in Kalamazoo.

"I cried the first two years I spoke at this event," said Rosemary Gardiner, director of development and public relations for Children and Family Services, who has been accepting the gifts on behalf of the social-services agency for five years.

Gardiner has seen many children receive the gifts from the quilters.

"They get very excited," Gardiner said in a telephone interview before Tuesday's event, at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Kalamazoo.

"This comes so close to reaching out and filling a little child's heart with joy," Gardiner said.

"These gifts are so personal -- like a gift you'd received from your grandmother at Christmas when you were a little child," Gardiner said.

For the children at Sylvia's Place, a shelter for women and their children fleeing abusive homes, the gifts "bring big smiles and hugs. They love them; they sleep with them," Executive Director Shelly Lorbeck-Dietz said.

"One little girl just held the animal to her cheeks," Lorbeck-Dietz said.

"Some carry them around with them. Some leave them in their bedrooms but go back to check on them," Lorbeck-Dietz said.

"The quilts are very soft and pleasant for a child to hold," Lorbeck-Dietz said. "The work is incredibly well-done."

Ginnie Hessler, who initiated and has been organizing the event for five years, said that at their annual Christmas party, the quilters used to simply exchange gifts among themselves.

"Then we realized we didn't need anything," Hessler said.

That led to teddy bears wrapped in quilts the first year and then other stuffed animals in handmade quilts, Hessler said.

"Squirrels, ducks, giraffes, bunnies, deer, cats -- the quilts often pick up the pattern of the little animal in the quilting," Gardiner said.

Kristine Ballard, of Portage, a Log Cabin Quilters member for five years, said making and giving the quilts is ``sending a piece of myself out to a sad place, a place where I can't possibly be."

Ballard was referring to Sylvia's Place and the children who go there after leaving abusive homes.

``It's real heartwarming to know we can help someone out there," Ballard said.

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## Food pantries benefit

Thursday, December 20, 2007

**klongley@citpat.com -- 768-4917**

Several Jackson County food pantries are getting \$16,000 this holiday season thanks to area students.

Sixteen school districts accepted a challenge from the Youth Advisory Committee of the Jackson County Community Foundation to hold a food drive and were rewarded with a \$1,000 grant to the local food pantry of their choice.

The Salvation Army -- the most popular choice -- will receive \$4,000.

"It will really help with our Christmas effort and with our food pantry," said Maj. John Mallett, executive director. "The great thing about it is students were encouraged to participate."

Though the youth committee gives a holiday gift to charity every year, this was the first time it had offered such a challenge to students. The goal was to prove to young people their ability to effect change in the community.

There was no requirement for how much food was collected, but foundation leaders said all the schools did great.

"I was not surprised by the results," said Christine Taylor, the foundation's youth and education coordinator. "They all did very well. Because the schools (collect food) every year, we really wanted to validate them for their efforts."

Committee member Andrew Craft, a Lumen Christi High School sophomore, said he was impressed by his peers.

"I just feel grateful that I can give back to the community," he said. "And it's sort of fun giving away other people's money for a good cause."

The grants are awarded through the Kellogg Youth Fund, which was established to encourage youth philanthropy and to meet youth-related needs in the community.

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# THE BAY CITY TIMES

## Auto dealership donates van to rescue mission

Thursday, December 20, 2007

By Pati LaLonde

plalonde@bc-times.com | 894-9666

Christmas came early for the staff and residents of Good Samaritan Rescue Mission in the form of a 1998 Pontiac Montana van, with just a little more than 100,000 miles on it.

The van was donated to the local mission by Dunlop Pontiac Inc., 517 Washington Ave., on Wednesday.

It all came about in a Christmas miracle sort of way.

Dan Streeter called Mike Beattie, owner of the auto dealership, and told him that the mission needed to replace its 1995 Dodge Caravan with more than 200,000 miles.

Meanwhile, Dick Frontjes, a frequent volunteer at the mission, stopped by to see Beattie as well.

Beattie checked the lot and found the perfect van for the mission.

He then asked his staff to help out.

In lieu of buying gifts for each other, Beattie asked his employees to give the money to the mission.

Technicians at the dealership already have chipped in by refurbishing the van.

As for the money, Beattie isn't sure how much is coming in.

"At this point, I don't know," he said. "Regardless of what it is, the van will be donated."

Streeter couldn't be happier.

The van will seat seven people and has removable seats so it can be used for hauling people and cargo.

"For us, it's been the perfect Christmas present," Streeter said. "The staff is excited. It's a better quality vehicle to take residents to and from places we need to get to."

Streeter says the van will be used to transport residents to doctors appointments and to look at apartments or other places they need to get to quickly.

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Grand Rapids Press Letters

December 20, 2007

## **Handout is wrong answer**

I am writing in response to the "Mother of triplets moves to Hastings apartment" (Press, Dec. 13).

Monica Roberts met a guy at a bar, had pre-marital sex and had three babies. On top of that she was homeless and living off the state. She claims she is a Christian. Part of being a Christian is to take accountability for one's actions, to be humble and unselfish. How is one (Monica Roberts) going to take responsibility for her actions if everyone else is handing out donations for her mistake? I believe every child conceived is a blessing from God. Although every Christian sins every day, we also have to learn by fessing up and fixing our sins. I would rather have my tax dollars go to a single mom who works her butt off to provide for her children, and who is humble. This is why I believe some people who need the state's help cannot get it because it goes to women like Roberts. The father has not stepped up to the plate, nor has Monica Roberts, everyone else has been providing for her along with her mother.

-- GENEVA R. WYNIA/Hudsonville

## Jobless rate in state drops to 7.4%

December 20, 2007

BY JOHN GALLAGHER

FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

After a year of mostly rising unemployment, Michigan got some slightly better news Wednesday as the state's November jobless rate declined and state employers reported a modest increase of 3,000 jobs last month.

The November unemployment rate fell to 7.4% from October's 7.7% rate, according to the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth. However, even the improved rate could be high enough to leave Michigan with the worst rate in the nation, as it was in October.

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"Modest recalls in manufacturing caused a slight reduction in Michigan's November jobless rate," said Rick Waclawek, director of the state's Bureau of Labor Market Information and Strategic Initiatives.

November marked the first monthly unemployment rate decline for the state since May. The U.S. jobless rate was unchanged at 4.7%.

Among specific industries, the state's hard-hit manufacturing sector recorded its first uptick in jobs since June, adding 2,000 positions. Professional and business services added 3,000 jobs in November.

Contact **JOHN GALLAGHER** at 313-222-5173 or [gallagher@freepress.com](mailto:gallagher@freepress.com).

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## Requests for help triple

### Meantime, Red Kettle donations down by half

By Christy Strawser  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

This holiday season is a little different at Salvation Army branches across southeast Michigan. Instead of people dropping off donations, folks these days are stopping by to ask for help.

Requests for assistance increased 292 percent this year in metro Detroit, including Macomb County, said Michelle St. Pierre, a spokeswoman for the Salvation Army.

And the Red Kettle Campaign has collected \$3.4 million, less than half its \$7.2 million goal in Macomb, Oakland, and Wayne counties, and about \$300,000 below its collection total this time last year. The kettle drive ends Christmas Eve, but checks and online donations are collected until Jan. 31.

"We're definitely worried because typically if we don't have somewhere in the vicinity of 70 percent of the goal by now, that's an indicator that we're going to have a problem," said John Hale, interim director of development for the Salvation Army in metro Detroit. "I don't see anything that's positive."

Red Kettle donations help the Salvation Army run year-round meal and shelter programs and special events for the holidays, like gifts and dinners for senior citizens and the disabled. The Army puts together Christmas food baskets for needy families and offers toy shops where parents and grandparents collect presents to put under the tree.

Hale said local branches already are having to take cash out of the kettle drive to buy items for toy shops, which have received about 50 percent fewer donations than a year ago.

"We're trying to reconcile (the decrease) with being down in donations," St. Pierre said. "People are losing jobs, they can't sell their homes. People who used to give \$25 are coming in to ask for a toy for their child or help with an electric bill."

To help boost donations, the Salvation Army is hosting Red Kettle Day from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. today at the Salvation Army Corps and Community Center at I-696 and Mound in Warren.

The atmosphere will be festive with a live broadcast by WWJ, and a toy shop where pre-approved parents and grandparents can pick up a toy or game to put under the tree.

"The goal is to really give people an idea of what a day in the life of the Salvation Army is like," St. Pierre said.

Hale can sum that up in a single word: busy.

"We feed about 9,000 people every day of the year," Hale said. "We like to talk about the toy shops, but we also do gifts for seniors who are in nursing homes, programs for the disabled, all that stuff."

Locally, Red Kettle donations helped more than 480,000 people in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties this year, provided more than 2.2 million meals, and tens of thousands of gifts for children.

The Salvation Army also offers emergency homeless shelters, substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation. It also helps pay utility bills, fund foster care for abused children, runaways and wards of the court, and offers residential programs for pregnant teens.

"We have tons of food boxes that we're sending out in 13 locations in metro Detroit. The need this year is greater than ever before," Hale said. "We're hearing from a lot of people who say 'I sent you money last year', and now they're saying 'I need the number for social services.'"

Hale hasn't give up hope in a Christmas miracle, saying he still believes things can turn around.

"We believe in the generosity of the people in southeastern Michigan," Hale said. "People understand that you just never know when you're going to need help yourself."

Donations are accepted at [www.salmich.org](http://www.salmich.org) or over the phone at 877-SAL-MICH.

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# THE MINING Journal

## Local News

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### Need is great for charities

By KIM HOYUM, Journal Staff Writer

*POSTED: December 19, 2007*

MARQUETTE — Local charities are seeing an upswing in requests for help this season, as high utility bills and food costs send more residents looking for assistance.

Uncertainties in state and federal funding for charitable organizations are compounding the problem, and Michigan's economic plight means more people are falling short on necessities, workers at several local charities said.

"Helping people with utilities and rent has just been tremendous," said Ron Provost, who works in the Marquette St. Vincent de Paul's financial aid office.

"We're seeing a lot of utility situations that I'm afraid are going to be repetitive," said Capt. Donna Rose of the Marquette Salvation Army.

"People are seeking lots of help," said Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services.

It's a refrain that's becoming more commonly heard from charities and state organizations around this time of year, as winter heating bills push some families closer to the edge.

But they're saying this year is even worse than usual because the long-term economic trends in the state and in the Upper Peninsula are headed downhill, and there just may not be enough help to go around.

At St. Vincent's, the money that's available for emergency help with bills or food comes from donations from Marquette County parishes and income from St. Vincent's stores.

People have to have an eviction or shutoff notice before they can receive assistance, though, and St. Vincent's usually can't pay large rent bills, so they coordinate help with other local charities, Provost said.

The food pantry in Marquette feeds between 500 and 600 families each month and one in Gwinn feeds between 300 and 350 families, Provost said. That adds up to a \$15,000 grocery bill for the charity each month.

"My eyes have really been opened — I don't think a lot of people in Marquette know how bad it is," he said.

### Article Photos



Volunteers Pierre Geoffrion, left, and Jerry Gerou put together a weekly food package at St. Vincent de Paul's food pantry. (Journal photo by Kim Hoyum)

Provost attributed much of the increase in need to higher unemployment and lower-paying jobs for those who have them. In addition, St. Vincent's is experiencing more of an overflow from the Michigan Department of Human Services.

"I think part of that's the situation with the state — DHS just doesn't have the money to help these people, and they've had to refer them to us," Provost said.

Sorbet said her department has money available but there are more applicants overall, so they are referring more applicants who aren't eligible under state rules to organizations like the Salvation Army or St. Vincent's.

"We are taking requests for emergency assistance, but there's such a big need out there," Sorbet said.

She added the downturn in the state economy plus an early winter means heat assistance in particular is in high demand.

"Heat is one of the primary needs right now," Sorbet said, adding while DHS had to stop taking applications for heating help twice last year, it is able to take them now.

The Salvation Army's assistance programs are funded partly with state money, but also with private donations, Rose said. Depending on the funding source, there may be restrictions on some assistance, such as one-time help or requiring a shutoff notice, she said.

But it's tough to fill all the requests when they don't know how long the state money will last, Rose said.

"The funny thing about state funding is you never know when they're going to cut it off, which is what everyone is experiencing," she said.

And while it's the giving season, she said these issues won't be going away in the new year when winter settles in deeper.

"People get into the giving mode right now because it's Christmas, but in January or February we are going to need support as well," Rose said.

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### Police now on trail of toy thieves

Thursday, December 20, 2007

#### FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Muskegon police said several tips have now been received in connection with Friday's breaking and entering at the Hope Lighthouse Community Center, where Christmas toys meant for needy children were stolen.

Detective Sgt. Monica Shirey said Wednesday that the tips were received through Silent Observer, and a detective has been assigned to investigate them.

Previously, police said they were unable to investigate the theft of the toys donated for Toys for Tots because there were no leads.

Friday's break-in was the second at the center, 444 Irwin, where toys gathered for the U.S. Marine Corps annual campaign were taken. The first break-in occurred Dec. 2-3. On Friday, the inside of the building was ransacked and toys meant for children ages 10 and older were taken.

Shirey said police still are looking for more information.

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Published December 20, 2007

#### New contracts

- State workers represented by unions will get no raise next October, followed by 1 percent raises in October 2009 and 3 percent raises in October 2010.
- They will pay a greater share of premiums and higher co-pays for health insurance.

## State finalizes union pacts

Workers will forgo raises in '08 and pay more for health care

Chris Andrews  
Lansing State Journal

The Michigan Civil Service Commission finalized contracts with five state unions Wednesday, including pacts that had been rejected by the rank and file.

The new three-year deals mean that unionized state workers will go without raises in October 2008 and will pay more for their health insurance.

They will get 1 percent raises in October 2009 and 3 percent pay boosts in October 2010.

"As usual, I feel that state employees, especially the members of UAW Local 6000, stepped up to the plate to help the state in another fiscal crisis," said Sandra Parker, president of UAW Local 6000. "But you can't keep coming to us. The well is dry. You need to find some way to fix the structural deficit that is still existing."

The union represents about 17,000 workers, including social workers, probation officers and secretaries.

Five unions reached tentative agreements with the state several weeks ago on the contracts.

UAW Local 6000 and SEIU Local 517M members ratified their contracts, but the Michigan State Employees Association, the Michigan Corrections Organization and AFSCME Council 25 members rejected theirs.

An impasse panel, consisting of members appointed by the Civil Service Commission, had recommended a couple of changes to the rejected contracts, including one affecting corrections officers who call in sick and later work overtime.

But the commission opted to stay with the agreements negotiated by the Office of the State Employer and union leaders.



The commission also approved a wage freeze in October 2008 for non-unionized employees.

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or [candrews@lsj.com](mailto:candrews@lsj.com).

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# The Daily Telegram

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**THURSDAY DECEMBER 20, 2007** Last modified: *Wednesday, December 19, 2007 10:52 AM EST*

## EDITORIAL

### Study shows why state pay freeze needed

At issue: State employee unions rejecting a one-year pay freeze despite a study showing their pay is sixth-highest in the nation, and their benefits costs are third-highest.

Our view: Reforming pay and benefit costs is vital if Michigan is to avoid a public sector meltdown.

Michigan's economic woes are well known: the nation's highest unemployment, the nation's highest total loan write-offs, declining household income and a state budget that keeps growing even though the government is so broke that it recently imposed a tax hike likely to cost more than \$2 billion.

We've noted before that one reason the state struggles balancing its budget is that compensation for state workers is too high compared with what other states offer, even states with the financial wherewithal.

Now, a recent study supports that point.

The Citizens Research Council of Michigan, a nonpartisan group, released a report last week that found the Michigan government classified employees' average base salary of \$49,715 is the sixth highest in the nation. Add to that the average cost of fringe benefits for state employees — \$25,703 (third-highest in the U.S.).

Given Michigan's woeful economy, there is no reason state employees should be paid above the national average, much less within the top six.

However state employee unions don't seem to agree. Three of five unions representing state workers recently voted to reject tentative contracts. They are unhappy because, next fiscal year, the proposals call for no pay raise. There would be a 1 percent raise in fiscal 2009 and a 3 percent raise in fiscal 2010. There also would be higher costs for health insurance premiums and copays. An impasse panel was scheduled to make recommendations last Friday to the Civil Service Commission.

Michigan residents and officials should make a few recommendations of their own. The auto industry was forced to reform worker compensation or go bankrupt, yet state government still gives its employees chrome-plated benefits reminiscent of Motown's glory days. Michigan residents' household incomes are declining. Many have no health insurance. Many others have no jobs. Asking state workers who average \$75,418 in wages and fringe benefits to accept a one-year pay freeze and bring benefits nearer to what peers in wealthier states receive is more than reasonable.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has failed to provide leadership on this issue, which is not surprising since state employees are among her most loyal supporters. But the long term threat posed by unfunded pension liabilities requires action now. It should be easy for a governor who, back on Sept. 30, was tough enough to shut down the state and kick visiting tourists out of their camp sites until she received the tax hikes that she demanded.

We don't fault state employees. Most are good workers, and their cuts must be shared by lawmakers, the governor and other officials. But residents cannot afford higher taxes to bail out state retirement funds. Less expensive

benefits and lower, multi-tiered pay scales are essential. Contract time is the time to make those changes.

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Article published Dec 20, 2007

State workers can donate politically through payroll deduction

*Associated Press*

LANSING, Mich. — Unionized state workers should be able to have political donations deducted from their paychecks to raise money for union-backed candidates and issues, the state Civil Service Commission decided Wednesday.

By a 3-1 vote, the commission ignored a warning from the attorney general's office that it didn't have the authority to approve payroll deductions for political donations and that the move would politicize the state civil service system, which is designed to protect state workers from political meddling.

State employee unions would reimburse the state for the administrative costs of enrolling workers and making sure the deductions were taken out of paychecks. But it's likely the decision will face a legal challenge before the deductions are allowed.

Bob LaBrant of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce said the commission should wait to make a decision until after the Court of Appeals decides whether a lower court ruling allowing Michigan Education Association members to deduct union political action committee donations from their paychecks should stand.

He noted that a 2006 opinion by Republican Attorney General Mike Cox said such deductions are not allowed.

"It's much too premature to have this rush" to adopt payroll deduction for political contributions for state employees, he told the commission. "This will precipitate legal action."

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**From:** Kim Frisch <frischk@MICHIGAN.GOV>  
**To:** <DHS-PRESSRELEASES@LISTSERV.MICHIGAN.GOV>  
**Date:** 12/20/2007 8:54:34 AM  
**Subject:** DHS NEWS RELEASE: Voice 2 lists ten priorities for DHS in helping foster youths leaving care

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Colleen Steinman or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Voice 2 lists ten priorities for DHS in helping foster youths leaving care  
Report cites progress on original recommendations

Dec. 20, 2007

Foster youths today presented DHS Director Ismael Ahmed with a report outlining ten priorities to guide the Michigan Department of Human Services as it cares for foster youths soon to leave the state's custody.

"Voice 2: Discussing Issues and Concerns of Michigan Foster Youth" is the work of 18 youth boards representing 28 counties. It evaluates the progress on the youth boards' original 15 recommendations issued in 2005 and asks DHS and the Michigan courts to continue working on issues critical to young adults who will soon leave or have recently left foster care.

Some of the recommendations include devoting resources to keep families together, maintaining sibling connections, involving youths in decisions and ensuring youths have education and housing before leaving foster care. A very important focus is the need for all young people to have a permanent connection to a caring adult before they leave foster care. The full document can be viewed on [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs) in the Spotlight box.

"I am grateful for their efforts," Ahmed said. "Their voices have been heard. Changes in DHS practice and policy help foster youths grow into productive, contributing adults."

A study of former foster youths in three Midwestern states found that those who left foster care at age 18 were:

- three times more likely than their peers who had not been in foster care to be unemployed or not in school.
- twice as likely to be unable to pay their rent.
- fewer than half had bank accounts.
- 30 percent of the males and 11 percent of the females had been incarcerated at least once after leaving foster care.

A survey of 237 Michigan foster youths ages 18-23 found similar outcomes. Only 12 percent were employed full time and only 36 percent were working part time. More than half were on public assistance and 40 percent said they were either homeless or had no stable housing.

"The youth boards are critical to helping change these outcomes," said Kate Hanley, who manages DHS permanency programs. "We're making excellent progress in addressing their most basic needs, but there is more to be done and this document helps articulate where we can devote our resources to do the most good."

The youths want to see more resources devoted to preserving families through supports that allow them to remain safely with their birth parents. If they must be removed from the home, they want a “Sibling Bill of Rights” that allows them to be placed with their siblings or have structured contact with them. The youths also want to have a say in decisions made about their placement. “Nothing about us without us,” is the motto caseworkers are urged to adopt in team decision-making meetings that determine where a youth will be placed.

Supports to help youths learn to drive and obtain a driver's license, apply for higher education financial aid and obtain important life skills such as financial planning are critical to help the transition from foster youth to adult, the report states.

For more information and copies of Voice 2 and the progress report on Voice 1, go to [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs) or [www.michigan.gov/fyit](http://www.michigan.gov/fyit)



*Western Michigan Northern Indiana Division*

**NEWS RELEASE**

**For Immediate Release**  
December 19, 2007

**Contact: Matthew Saganski**  
**616-915-4991**

**Christmas comes early for hundreds of local foster children**  
***Surprise \$25,000 gift from Wal-Mart to be distributed to children in foster care placement***

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. Dec. 19, 2007 – This Thursday, the Benton Harbor Salvation Army will accept a \$25,000 donation from the Wal-Mart Foundation – a special surprise Christmas gift for local families with foster children in the home.

“When we first learned of the gift from Wal-Mart, we were kind of in shock,” said Captain Mike McKee, corps officer for Benton Harbor Salvation Army. “It was totally unexpected. But we knew right away that children who are in foster care placement outside of their original home would be especially touched by this special gift. Christmas is coming early for these children and it couldn’t be more perfect.”

Wal-Mart will present the \$25,000 donation in the form of 500 fifty-dollar gift cards on Thursday, December 20 at the Wal-Mart store located at 1400 Mall Drive, which The Salvation Army will then work with the Berrien County office of the Michigan Department of Human Services to distribute to children in foster care.

“The Salvation Army does so much to help people in need here in Benton Harbor and we are happy to be able to provide some additional financial assistance to help local children have the Christmas they deserve,” said Cary McClendon store manager at the Wal-Mart store located at 1400 Mall Drive

Eight communities were identified by The Salvation Army as areas where need is far greater than available resources. Gift cards will be presented to individuals and families in the following cities:

- Anchorage, Alaska
- Benton Harbor, Michigan
- Detroit, Michigan
- Camden, New Jersey
- Ashland, Ohio
- Portland, Oregon
- Knoxville, Tennessee
- Moundsville, West Virginia

“Unfortunately, job losses, the current crisis in home foreclosures and the high cost of gasoline have all contributed to families struggling in our area, ultimately increasing the number of people we serve locally,” said Matt Saganski, Salvation Army Public Relations and Communications Manager. “This gift from Wal-Mart will enable us to provide immediate assistance to the children in our area who need it the most.”

– More –

For more than 20 years, Wal-Mart has supported The Salvation Army through financial assistance and by allowing the familiar red kettles and bell-ringers in front of Wal-Mart stores and Sam's Clubs during the holiday season. Last year, approximately \$30 million was raised through donations made in kettles in front of these stores and clubs, accounting for almost 25 percent of all donations raised during the Red Kettle Campaign.

This year, Wal-Mart and The Salvation Army have partnered together for several events, all designed to raise awareness of the Army, to provide financial assistance and to encourage donations to an organization that helps people in local communities everywhere. These events include:

- **Bells Ringing Across America** – Wal-Mart and Sam's Club associates participated in the retailer's second annual "Bells Ringing Across America" event on Nov. 27. Associates at all Wal-Mart stores and Sam's Clubs nationwide rang bells outside of their respective locations simultaneously for one-half hour. During the event, Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott and The Salvation Army's National Commander Israel Gaither rang bells outside the Wal-Mart store in Battle Creek, Mich., where Scott presented The Salvation Army with a \$1 million check on behalf of the Wal-Mart Foundation. Red kettles have been stationed outside Wal-Mart and Sam's Club locations since Nov. 23 and will be there through Christmas Eve. Customers can also make contributions to The Salvation Army through Wal-Mart's online kettle, which can be accessed at [www.walmart.com](http://www.walmart.com) and [www.samsclub.com](http://www.samsclub.com).
- **Christmas Carol Concert** – Wal-Mart and The Salvation Army aired a Christmas Carol Concert on the retailer's in-store TV network nationwide. The special was broadcast on Dec. 7 and featured performances by The Salvation Army's New York Staff Brass Band and the Wal-Mart choir, and a holiday message from renowned Pastor Rick Warren, author of "*The Purpose Driven Life*."
- **Sam's Club Dream Drive** – In partnership with the Off the Field Players Wives Association, Sam's Club provided up to \$50,000 worth of merchandise and food for Salvation Army families enrolled in the charity's Adopt a Family Program. Professional and legendary football players' wives shopped for the families at participating Sam's Club locations on Dec. 6 in Buffalo, Chicago, Dallas, Denver and San Diego.
- **Salvation Army Brass Band Concerts** – The Salvation Army's local Brass Bands are performing special concerts at Wal-Mart and Sam's Club locations the country throughout the holiday season.

In April, The Salvation Army presented Wal-Mart with its Evangeline Booth Award for excellence in corporate philanthropy. Donations made to The Salvation Army through stores and clubs will go directly toward helping those in need, right in their own neighborhoods.

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Media interested in photos and/or interviews are asked to call  
Matthew Saganski at (616) 915-4991.